

Washington, D.C. - In a letter written to President Bush Tuesday, U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk (R-Highland Park), along with nine other Republican members of Congress, called on the President to strengthen rules on mercury emissions from coal-fired power plants. The plan set forth by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in December fails to address mercury "hot spots" threatening precious environmental ecosystems, such as the Great Lakes and the Atlantic coast.

"We commend the President for publicly acknowledging the health and environmental problems associated with mercury emissions from coal-fired power plants and are glad the EPA is taking the long-awaited first step to reduce mercury emissions for the first time," said Kirk. "But we feel this rule could be strengthened by addressing mercury "hot spots" now, rather than later."

The plan set forth by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) requires coal-fired power plants to reduce their mercury emissions by 70 percent by 2018. The plan also calls for a national cap and trade system to yield emissions reductions which reduces endless litigation over plant modifications and is simpler to administer and enforce. But recent analysis of EPA modeling shows that local emissions of mercury are largely responsible for mercury deposition "hot spots" calling into question whether a national cap and trade system can adequately address areas of elevated mercury deposition ("hot spots") across the country that need to be addressed now.

"My top environmental goal in Congress is to protect Lake Michigan and the Great Lakes," said Kirk. For too long, the federal government has ignored mercury pollution. In taking this critical first step, we must set standards that will encourage the development and commercialization of the new technologies that will ultimately be necessary to reduce mercury emissions to a level that protects human health."

The number of States issuing warnings for mercury pollution rose to 44 in 2002. A report from the National Wildlife Federation in 2003 showed significant amounts of mercury in rainwater on the North Shore of Chicago, increasing the likelihood of contamination of the Great Lakes ecosystem.